

United States District Court

Federal Court

Re: United States vs. Joshua Cook

June 20, 2020

I am writing regarding my son, Joshua Cook. The child you see before you is not a killer, not a drug dealer, not any of those things that would cause such an extreme punishment. The victim, E [REDACTED] (6 months pregnant at the time) was a friend of ours. And she was also an addict and was begging for Josh to help her, so her baby does not start to go into withdrawals. It took Josh hours to find someone with what she needed. Joshua had no money and he was just middleman doing his friend a favor so her baby would be ok. If she called me instead, I could not say that it would not be me standing before you. I am an addict like E [REDACTED] and Joshua. When you are caught up in addiction your values and morals are pushed aside and drugs control every moment, every action of everyday.

I only have this one chance to hope you understand why we feel that this hefty sentence for a child born into and suffering from severe substance use disorder. My child was born to an addict for a mother, and I was born to two parents that are addicts. Because of my traumatic childhood and early adulthood (when Josh was born), I failed him as a mother. With my best intentions and effort, I loved him but had no idea the impact of my untreated mental health and addiction would cause him. I did not know how to nurture or teach my son the valuable lessons he would need to be a successful adult. I was more a "fun big sister" than mother and taught him nothing beneficial. I was a ward of the state as a child because of my neglected upbringing and he was quick to follow in my footsteps. He was put in placement at 13 and would stay until he aged into adulthood.

He acted out in placement and I was now in the grips of active addiction. I was the first parent ever charged in NH for smuggling Josh in drugs at YDC so he could relax enough to come home. He went straight to county jail from YDC for my actions, and now my son is so institutionalized he hasn't been able to recover from being sent there as a child to ever make it out of jail longer than 6 to 8 months, before he brings himself back. He comes out, he and I use together, running together until one or both of us are in jail. This would repeat for the next 3 years. I am not proud of any of this but unfortunately, it is my truth. When our friend Liz died and he could not save her, he was not okay. That was the breaking point for all of us. He went into jail, traumatized and in that moment, I had fell to my knees and was determined to take my will back. I was done, finished running. I was not willing to let my addiction take one more thing from me. While Josh sat facing these charges, I went to treatment. I came out and started my recovery. I graduated from Hillsborough North Drug Court and just completed my probation today. I started taking courses and today, I am licensed with the state and work in the addiction field as a CRSW. I also serve at the state area level for Narcotics Anonymous. I was more of a lost soul then anyone and I found a new way to live. Why can't Joshua have that same chance?

The prosecutors feel like my son is just another criminal, he is not. He suffers from a disease which there is no known cure, but recovery is possible. It should be possible. Extreme sentencing and labeling him for being an addict should not be how we are handling these situations. My child deserves the right to be sentenced fairly, learn how to start treating his substance use disorder and be released before he is

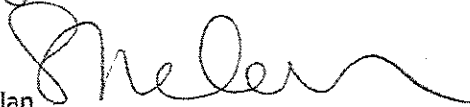
30 years old. We do not live in a time when we punish people for mandatory 20 years because you cannot stop using because you have never been treated or shown any way. Please Your Honor, I am praying that you look at the whole story and not just what you read in any court statements. He is a great child, born into generations of trauma and addiction.

I just celebrated 2 years clean from drugs and alcohol. I cannot wait for the day that I can show Joshua a new way of life for us. He and I have the closest connection. I would stop the Earth for him if I could. My guilt and shame kept me sick for a long time, I can not take back the damage I caused Joshua, I can only stay on this amazing journey of recovery and show him that it is possible.

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Kind Regards,

Shannon Nelan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Nelan', with a stylized, flowing script.

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